

**From:** (b) (6)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 03, 2011 5:26 PM  
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**Subject:** FW: How Bin Laden met his end 050311

**Attachments:** Bin Laden Compound 0511.jpg

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**From:** (b) (6)  
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**From:**  
**Sent:** Tue May 03 09:22:32 2011  
**Subject:** FW: How Bin Laden met his end 050311

## How Bin Laden met his end

- **Targeting the Al Qaeda leader with a missile strike wasn't enough. President Obama needed proof he was dead — and a much bolder plan.**

- <<Bin Laden Compound 0511.jpg>>

This satellite image provided by DigitalGlobe shows the compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, where Osama bin Laden lived. (Associated Press)

By Bob Drogin, Christi Parsons and Ken Dilanian, Los Angeles Times  
May 3, 2011

Reporting from Washington—

The nail-biting moment, the period when absolute disaster loomed, came at the very start.

About two dozen Navy SEALs and other U.S. commandos were supposed to rope down into a Pakistani residential compound from a pair of specially modified Black Hawk helicopters in the predawn hours Monday, race into two buildings, and capture or kill [Osama bin Laden](#). One chopper stalled as it hovered between the compound's high walls, unable to sustain its lift, and thudded into the dirt.

Half a world away in the [White House](#) Situation Room, the president and his war council crowded around a table covered with briefing papers and keyboards and watched nervously as video feeds streamed in. The special forces team needed a rescue chopper. Gunfire was blazing around them. No one wanted another "Black Hawk Down" debacle.

"A lot of people were holding their breath," recalled [John Brennan](#), the president's counter-terrorism advisor. The extraordinary drama surrounding the killing of Bin Laden encompassed the White House, the [CIA](#) and other arms of America's vast national security apparatus. The tale is part detective story, part spy thriller. But the decade-old manhunt for the [Al Qaeda](#) leader ultimately came down to a three-story building on a dirt road in the Pakistani army town of Abbottabad, north of [Islamabad](#).

If the raid went wrong, [President Obama](#) would bear the blame. He had vetoed a plan to obliterate the compound with an airstrike. Obama wanted to be certain he had Bin Laden, and there was no guarantee that a smoking crater would yield proof. He had asked for a bolder plan, one that would allow the U.S. to take custody of Bin Laden or his body. It posed far more risk.

As reports flowed into the White House, the commando team methodically swept through the compound. Bin Laden and his family lived on the second and third floors of the largest structure, U.S. intelligence indicated. Officials said that when the commandos found him there, he was armed and "resisted." They shot him in the head and chest.

There were conflicting reports Monday about whether Bin Laden had fired at the Americans, or whether he had tried to use a woman as a human shield. His wife, who called out Bin Laden's name during the fight, was wounded in the leg during the battle and may have tried to interpose herself between the troops and her husband, but Bin Laden was not hiding behind her, a senior U.S. official said.

Within 20 minutes, the fighting had ended. In 20 more, the military had flown in a backup helicopter. The commandos questioned several people in the compound to confirm Bin Laden's identity, detonated explosives to destroy the crippled Black Hawk and then departed. As they flew off, they carried with them the bloodied corpse of the tall man with a thick beard.

In addition, the raiding party took "a large volume of information" from the compound, a U.S. official said, "so large that the CIA is standing up a task force" to examine it for clues. The material, which includes digital and paper files, could be a treasure trove of new intelligence about Al Qaeda, the official said. Among other things, officials hope the information will lead them to Al Qaeda's other leaders.

They left behind the bodies of four other people killed in the raid — a courier they had been tracking for years, his brother, one of Bin Laden's sons and an unidentified woman.

The Pakistani government, which had not been informed of the raid in advance, scrambled aircraft in response to the firefight, but the low-flying U.S. helicopters quickly flew out of Pakistani airspace.

Within hours, Bin Laden's remains had been given funeral rites designed by the military to be consistent with Muslim practices and dropped into the northern Arabian Sea from the hangar deck of the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson. The [FBI](#) quickly slapped "Deceased" on its Internet posters for the world's most wanted terrorist.

Bin Laden had vanished after the Sept. 11 attacks of 2001. [U.S. military](#) commanders had failed to close the noose around his Afghan stronghold in Tora Bora, and the Al Qaeda leader and his aides somehow hiked across the rugged border region into [Pakistan](#).

Once or twice a year, Bin Laden popped up on a new video or audio recording, mocking America's leaders and urging his faithful to follow his path. They did so with bombings in London, Madrid, Bali and elsewhere.

The CIA knew that Bin Laden had stopped using cellphones and other electronic or digital communications long ago to evade U.S. intelligence. He relied on human couriers instead to get his videos and other messages out to underlings and followers.

Find the courier, the thinking went, and they'd ultimately find Bin Laden.

Interrogators at the U.S. naval base at [Guantanamo Bay](#) were pushed to ask Al Qaeda suspects in custody about possible couriers. The information came in pieces, a U.S. official said, and it took years.

The information enabled the CIA and other intelligence agencies to develop "a composite" of Bin Laden's courier network.

"One courier in particular had our constant attention," a U.S. intelligence official said. Detainees "indicated he might be living with and protecting Bin Laden. But for years, we were unable to identify his true name or his location."

The break came in 2007. Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the former operations chief for Al Qaeda and self-described mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks, disclosed the nickname of a Pakistani man he said was Bin Laden's most trusted confidant and courier. Confirmation came from Abu Faraj Libbi, another captured Al Qaeda leader, and other prisoners.

Several media outlets identified the courier Monday as Maulawi Abd Khaliq Jan based on a U.S. military assessment file on Libbi that was released by [WikiLeaks](#) last week. An administration official said that name was incorrect. Officials have so far declined to identify him.

It took the CIA until last summer to find his fortified compound in Abbottabad, a quiet city in rolling hills north of Islamabad. Named for a British colonial officer, the former hill station is home to a prestigious Pakistani military academy, an army regiment and thousands of retired military officers.

Satellite photos showed the house and 1-acre compound had been built in 2005. The high walls, barbed wire and pervasive security cameras suggested it was designed as a private fortress.

It took months to build a picture of who was living in the compound, but eventually the CIA concluded that one of the families was likely to include Bin Laden, several wives and children.

"There wasn't perfect visibility on everything inside the compound, but we did have a very good idea" of how many people lived there, how many women and children were in one of the families, and other pertinent details, said one of the intelligence officials.

With help from the [National Security Agency](#), which intercepts communications, and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, which provides detailed maps and other data, the intelligence finally coalesced in February.

"Our confidence level grew much higher" that Bin Laden might be hiding in the compound, a senior official said. But the intelligence wasn't definitive. No one had seen him for certain, and there was concern that obtrusive surveillance efforts would be discovered and cause him to flee.

As the details accumulated, Obama ordered his national security team to develop courses of action, according to senior administration officials. The team brought several proposals for attacking the site, and they were refined over the next few weeks.

"There was a body of intelligence brought" to Obama, a Pentagon official said, "but in the weeks and months beforehand, his personal attention pushed the case to a new level."

As officials refined their plans, the SEALs team practiced the raid in early April, using a replica of the compound. Officials said they hadn't decided in advance to kill Bin Laden rather than take him prisoner.

"There were certainly capture contingencies," said a senior Pentagon official. But until nearly the last minute, it wasn't clear the mission would go.

Obama met with his senior national security aides on Thursday to review three options: the commando raid, an airstrike, or a pause for further intelligence gathering. He went around the table of advisors and asked each to weigh in.

The intelligence remained uncertain about whether Bin Laden was actually at the compound. Half of those present supported the raid; the rest were divided between the other two choices, a senior official said. Obama then left the meeting without announcing his decision.

Friday morning, just before Obama flew to Alabama to survey the devastation left by a flurry of tornadoes, the team met again in the White House Diplomatic Room. "It's a go," the president said. The UH-60 Black Hawks were supposed to fly on Saturday, but because of bad weather, the commanders pushed the schedule back a day.

Had the operation gone that day as planned, it would have coincided closely with a [North Atlantic Treaty Organization](#) airstrike on a villa in Tripoli where Libyan leader [Moammar Kadafi](#), another longtime U.S. foe, apparently had visited. He escaped harm, but the missiles apparently killed one of his sons and three grandchildren.

Saturday evening, the president grinned broadly and offered light remarks at the annual White House correspondents

dinner at a hotel in Washington. He joked about releasing his birth certificate and poked fun at [Donald Trump](#).

Comedian Seth Meyers quipped that Bin Laden was hiding in plain sight by hosting a [C-SPAN](#) show. The president had in fact spent much of the day being briefed on the operation.

On Sunday, Obama monitored the final preparations in the Situation Room, along with Tom Donilon, his national security advisor. Others quickly gathered, including Vice President [Joe Biden](#), Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Defense Secretary [Robert M. Gates](#), Joint Chiefs Chairman Adm. [Michael G. Mullen](#) and James R. Clapper, director of national intelligence.

The president joined the group as the operation got underway around 2 p.m. Sunday Washington time — around midnight in Pakistan. The room was silent in between reports.

"It was probably one of the most anxiety-filled periods of time, I think, in the lives of the people who were assembled here yesterday," said Brennan, the president's Arabic-speaking counter-terrorism advisor. "The minutes passed like days."

At 3:50 p.m. Sunday, Obama was told that Bin Laden had been "tentatively" identified. A few hours later, he was told that there was a "high probability" that the Al Qaeda leader had been killed. DNA tests, using samples from several Bin Laden family members, would later confirm Bin Laden's identity.

The risk had paid off.  
Brennan said Obama's reaction to the news was simple: "We got him."

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## **Bin Laden's sea burial fuels conspiracy theories**

### **The U.S. faces a quandary in proving the Al Qaeda's leader death without inflaming his supporters, and may release photos of his body. Skeptics include the mother of a Sept. 11 victim.**

- By Matea Gold, Eryn Brown and David S. Cloud, Los Angeles Times

May 2, 2011, 6:40 p.m.

Reporting from Washington and Los Angeles— Within hours of the raid on [Osama bin Laden](#)'s Pakistani compound, the [CIA](#) had used 21st century technology to get "a virtually 100% [DNA](#) match" on the dead man. But something out of another century may come back to haunt Washington: the [Al Qaeda](#) leader's burial at sea.

Conspiracy theorists on both the left and right were quick to insist that Bin Laden was either still alive or had been dead for years, pouncing on the government's decision to slide the body of the world's most wanted man off a board into the Arabian Sea.

As blogs hummed with allegations that the [Obama](#) administration had faked the middle-of-the-night raid, the Bin Laden "death hoax" threatened to replace questions about President Obama's citizenship as the latest Internet rumor to go viral.

#### **[Photos: Osama bin Laden's death](#)**

"I am sorry, but if you believe the newest death of OBL, you're stupid," antiwar activist [Cindy Sheehan](#) posted on her [Facebook](#) page. "Just think to yourself — they paraded Saddam's dead sons around to prove they were dead — why do you suppose they hastily buried this version of OBL at sea?"

Infowars, the website of Libertarian radio host Alex Jones, was crammed with stories charging that the U.S.

government had concocted the killing to justify a security crackdown. The [Tea Party](#) Nation website brimmed with indignant posts questioning the timing of Obama's announcement.

"Don't you think OBAMA needs something to assure his reelection," one commenter wrote.

Even a relative of one of the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks voiced skepticism, citing the burial at sea.

"Is it true or false? I don't know," said Stella Olender of Chicago, whose daughter Christine died at the World Trade Center. "To me that seems strange, that they disposed of it and no one [besides] whoever was right there knows what happened."

The conspiracy theories spoke to the quandary facing the U.S.: proving the Al Qaeda leader's death without inflaming his supporters and the broader Muslim world. Because of that concern, U.S. officials were considering the merits of releasing gory photos of Bin Laden taken after he was shot.

The burial, which was carried out from aboard the aircraft carrier Carl Vinson in the northern part of the Arabian Sea, was necessary because arrangements couldn't be made with any country to bury Bin Laden within 24 hours, as dictated by Muslim practice, administration officials said. But a senior military officer said the U.S. also wanted to avoid creating a shrine somewhere on land that would attract his followers.

Administration officials insisted Monday that there was no question who was killed in the Pakistani raid. Along with being visually identified on the scene by U.S. operatives, Bin Laden was identified by name by a woman believed to be one of his wives, according to a senior intelligence official. On Sunday evening, CIA specialists compared photos of the body with known photos of Bin Laden, determining with 95% certainty that they were one and the same.

On Monday morning, the CIA and other agencies conducted an "initial DNA analysis," comparing a sample taken from the body with DNA samples from several Bin Laden family members. The results, the official said, gave them "a virtually 100% DNA match."

The intelligence community has been collecting DNA samples from Bin Laden relatives for years, according to another U.S. intelligence official. Because the family is so big, obtaining samples was not difficult, officials said, particularly from relatives who denounce Bin Laden's activities.

Rep. [Mike Rogers](#) (R-Mich.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee and a former [FBI](#) agent, confirmed that the government had more than one source of DNA.

"Through the DNA testing and other things, it is clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that this was Osama bin Laden, based on the science," he said.

Dr. Frederick Bieber, a medical geneticist at Brigham and Women's Hospital, said it is possible for [genetic](#) kinship analysis to be done quickly, particularly if profiles of relatives have already been completed.

"Often it can be done overnight, and in high-profile forensic investigations, it often is," said Bieber, who declined to comment on the particulars of this case.

The administration was still weighing whether to release graphic photos of Bin Laden's bullet-pocked body to put the rumors of a hoax to rest. (A photo, purportedly of Bin Laden's corpse, circulating online was determined to be fake.)

"We are going to do everything we can to make sure that nobody has any basis to try to deny that we got Osama bin Laden," said [John Brennan](#), Obama's top counter-terrorism advisor. "And so, therefore, the releasing of information and whether that includes photographs — this is something to be determined."

Some congressional leaders suggested such a move was necessary.

"Unless there's an acknowledgement by people in Al Qaeda that Bin Laden is dead, it may be necessary to release the pictures — as gruesome as they will undoubtedly be, because he's been shot in the head — to quell any doubts that this somehow is a ruse that the American government has carried out," Sen. [Joe Lieberman](#) (I-Conn.) told reporters.

Rogers said there were pros and cons to distributing the photos widely.

"We want to make sure that we maintain dignity, if there was any, in Osama bin Laden so that we don't inflame our problems in places around the world and still provide enough evidence that people are confident that it was Osama bin Laden," he said.

In fact, doubt was also widespread in the Muslim world.

"He is still alive," said Sayed Mohammed, a chef at a restaurant in [Cairo's](#) bustling Zamalek neighborhood. "He is a clever guy — he is no [Hosni Mubarak](#)."

And in Peshawar, a city near [Pakistan's](#) militant-heavy tribal areas and a place where locals are vehemently anti-Western, many refused to believe that Bin Laden had been killed.

As he made copies at a Peshawar stationery store, Muhammad Sajjad said, "I am sure he will conquer America first, then he will die."

Of course, even if the government does release photographs of Bin Laden's body, that will not necessarily quell the doubters.

"It's certainly a hallmark of conspiracy theorists that whatever evidence is presented, they always find problems with it," said Brooks Jackson, director of FactCheck.org, a nonpartisan organization that monitors the factual accuracy of politicians. "There are still some people who say the moon landing was faked."

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